# [Ella Bartlett]

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NAME OF WORKER Louise Bassett

ADDRESS Brookfield, Massachusetts

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SUBJECT Living Lore

NAME & ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Ella Bartlett, Brookfield, Massachusetts

Ella Bartlett, or Miss Bartlett as she prefers to be called, comes from one of Brookfield's old-time first families. In the Victorian days when a few thousand dollars [wuz?] were considered a fortune by small towners, Miss Bartlett's father was a man of money and power. His daughter was brought up to paint a little, sing in a thin sweet voice, do fine needlework, keep house, and above all to be a “lady”. Miss Bartlett never forgot her training. She still paints scraggly pink rosebuds and golden water-lilies on china plates and cups. She gave up singing some years ago, but not her “deep interest in music “. .” She keeps house neatly in one little room in a private home where she also has the use of the kitchen to prepare her meals. Most important of all, Miss Bartlett has remembered her training as a lady. She can not forget the lovely days gone by when “Father” was a town official and wore a ponderous gold watch chain and drove through town in a fine carriage drawn by high stepping horses. She cherishes the thoughts of her girlhood when she was one of the towns' Four Hundred, admired and envied by the mill girls and “foreigners”. These are the memories that make little Miss Ella hold her head high, her back straight,

and never lets her complain because money is so scarce and she is old and lonely. Miss Ella's golden years are long gone by. There are only a few old friends left who remember “Father” and his money. Modern Brookfield regards her as “old Ella Bartlett”. Her proud little manners and cool air of superiority have not won friends. A few years ago when Miss Ella had to leave the little house where she had lived for years, it took the combined efforts of the minister and two selectmen to find a place for her to live. No one wanted this faded but still proud and haughty little bit of gentility in their homes.

How Miss Bartlett manager to live is her secret. Probably the minister shares it, but he does not tell. It may be the Old Age Pension, for certainly Ella Bartlett is well over eighty, it may be some private charity[md]whatever it is, Miss Bartlett makes the most of it. Her clothes are outmoded, but always neat, dainty and carefully brushed. She never forgets to wear gloves as a lady should. Her hat is always set perfectly straight, her gray hair neat and prim. Miss Ella never forgets she must keep up appearances and hold her head high. We laugh at her, but somehow we admire her. She'd probably be offended if we told her, but we like her because she's such a darned good sport.

Name: Louise G. Bassett

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Brookfield

Topic: Ella Bartlett

Ella Bartlett, a tiny woman with snapping, sparkling black, bird-like eyes[,?] that pierce you through and through, had come to call — or had she? After seating herself and commenting, at great length, on the weather we had been “enjoying”, she seemed restless, uneasy, unable to settle herself.

“What can she want?” I said to myself, “Maybe if I have some tea.”

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“I know you must be cold”, I used my most hospitable tones, “I'm going to get you some hot tea.”

“Well - [I?] -,” she said.

Assuring her that making tea was the easiest thing I did, I proved my statement by quickly reappearing with a pot of tea and some cookies. She ate a cookie, she sipped the tea, but, still something was not quite as it should be.

“Is your tea hot enough, perhaps you like it stronger — or weaker — there's plenty of hot water if you would care for some.”

“No thanks, for tea it's all right,” was the prim little lady's reply.

Oh, now we have it — “For tea. Oh, I'm so sorry, you don't care for tea, do you, how about some cocoa?” Oh, yes, I could see at once that cocoa would be most welcome, so, soon Miss Bartlett was chatting over a cup of cocoa.

“Were you born in Brookfield, Miss Bartlett?” I asked. It was a lucky question for the little figure lost some of its straightness and settled back rather comfortably in the stiff cane seated chair 2 she had insisted upon using.

“Yes, indeed, I was born in Brookfield. I won't tell you how many years ago, I want to forget the number if I can. I was born in the ‘Over the River District’, in the house Mark Wilson lives in now. I'm what they call a ‘native son'. Brookfield was a busy thrivin' little town when I was a girl and it had many worthwhile citizens then. You can't believe how many superior people lived in Brookfield back in the old days. We had, oh, so many really nice people. Things are very different now, people are so different,” and Ella Bartlett sighed, a real, deep, deep sigh.

“And they do different things, of course. Do tell me about the days in Brookfield when you were a young girl. They were fascinating times, weren't they?”

“Oh, my good woman, fascinating is hardly a strong enough word. The young folks of today with their automobiles, movies, drinks and cigarettes don't know what good times are.” Miss Bartlett's black eyes were brighter than ever, as, with a contemptuous toss of her head she continued? “In winter we had skatin', sleigh rides, taffy pulls, sugarin' off, church socials, dances of course, charades — they were more fun than these plays they put on now-a-days and cleverer, too, — quiltin' bee, though there didn't seem to be any set season for quiltin'. It always seemed as though most of the girls got engaged in the spring, I suppose the winter did that.”

“ 'the winter did that’? What do you mean?” I asked.

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“Well, you see the sleigh rides were sort of conducive to — well — you know how young folks are, sittin' close to each other and all that. We used to call it 'sparkin', — it's what they call ‘neckin', these days. You know what I mean, don't you?”

I said I did.

“I remember one spring”, she continued, “there was a lot of the girls that had got engaged and we did nothin' but make quilts for 'em. I was an awful quick sewer, so, of course I was always one of the first to be asked. We would think we'd got everybody quilted up, when some mornin' there'd be a knock at the front door and some boy or girl would be there to say that ‘Ma sent her compliments' and would I come to her quiltin' bee, and then we'd know another of the girls had got engaged. I declare sometimes I'd be so fair worn out that the mere thought of doin' another quilt would make me feel jest like droppin'.”

“Well, I don't see why you couldn't have found some reason for not going when you were so tired.”

“Oh, my goodness sakes, no! Why, I'd never think of doin' such a thing. If we was asked, we went, even if we was sick. We went if we could stand on our two feet. Of course in winter we didn't mind, the evenin's were long and we had more chance for a good time after we'd finished our quiltin' — then we wa'n't so tired as we were in summer, quiltin's awful hard work, let me tell you.”

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“Didn't you ever have any men at these ‘bees'?”

“Land sakes, I should say so, I don't believe there'd been any quiltin', if we hadn't known the men was comin'. They was always invited for the evenin' and then we'd all roast apples and chestnuts and pop corn,and lots of times they'd be a fiddler in and we'd dance. Then if the sleighin' was good, and it's queer but there used to be lots more snow those days then there is now[.?] Well, as I say, if the sleighin' was good we'd have a long bob sleigh or a wood sled and we'd drive home the longest way. My, my, but it was fun, such as the young folks know nothing about these days.”

Seeing that Miss Ella's cup was empty and anxious to keep her talking, I insisted upon filling it. She refused at first, but her refusal had no strength back of it, so she had more cocoa — , which, by the way, she drank.

“What about the summer, what did you do summer nights?”

“Well, of course, we had good times in summer too. We went boatin' and swimming, we'd go buggy drivin' and have church suppers, strawberry festivals, you know, and plenty of dances. Young folks will always dance I guess, and of course we would play croquet day after day. They didn't have golf those days.”

“You didn't quilt much in summer, I don't suppose.”

“No, not so awful much . It wa'n't much sport, let me tell you, for when it was hot we'd be so tired quiltin' all we'd want to do was to go home and go to bed. I remember one awful time — it was when Henrietta Daggett had got engaged — it was in July, and it was the 5 hottest July I recollect. One or two folks had been sunstruck and two of the real old folks was overcome by the heat and they had died, so, we had two funerals in one week and of course that meant a lot of extra cookin'.”

“ ‘Extra cooking[ ;?] I don't understand.”

“Why extra pies and cakes had to be baked for their families, you see. Funerals were always well attended in those days. Every relative they ever had always came no matter how far they had to drive and that meant a lot of folks to feed, so the neighbors did their part by sendin' things in to help out.

“Well, that week there wa'n't a cool spot in the town. In every house someone would get up around four in the mornin' and close all the windows and pull down all the shades and shut the shutters, if you had 'em and most everybody did. It was stylish to have shutters when I was a girl, jest like it's stylish now not to have 'em. But as I was sayin' in spite of havin' the windows shut and all, the whole house would be like an oven in less'n four hours.

“Well, we was expected to get to the Daggetts jest as soon as folks got their dinner dishes washed up and put away, so I guess it was most two o'clock before we got to quiltin'. We was wilted by the time we got to the houses but the minute we got there and the front door was opened — my — how nice and appetizing it did smell. We knew we would have something good to eat, anyway.

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“But, oh dear me, how our hearts sank when we saw the size of the quilt Henrietta was goin' to have us do. Later on I guessed it wa'n't as big as it looked to us that day but talkin'

it over with some of the girls long afterwards, I guess it was about the biggest one we ever did, and my sakes you ought to've seen the pattern — it was the sunflower pattern. You've seen the sunflower pattern, ain ‘ t you?”

“Oh, yes, many times but it's supposed to be a simple one isn't it?”

“Well, yes, it's supposed to be but this one wa'n't, I never saw so many pieces in a pattern, before or after. The calico pieces were bright and pretty and that helped. Some of the pieces were from dresses . the The older women could tell you jest who had 'em, how they was made and everything about 'em. One woman found a piece of her wedding dress that she'd given Mrs. Daggett long years before. She was dreadful excited when she saw it.

“Mrs. Daggett and Henrietta was busy all afternoon gettin' supper ready. I really believe those good smells from the kitchen kept us goin', anyway we finished the quilt and had it all rolled up by the time the men came. We'd all brought some things to put on to make us look sort of dressed up after we had got finished sewin'. I had crimped my hair and hadn't combed it out hopin' it might look kinda good when the evenin' came, but my sakes alive, it wa'n't nothin' but a string and a straight string at that, but I didn't mind much for I didn't have a 7 beau like most of the girls.

“I never cared much for men, I think they're conceited, don't you?”

I agreed with her that they are, as a general rule, very “conceited”.

“Tell me what did you have for supper. Was it as good as you hoped it would be?”

“Well, now jest wait and let me tell you. As soon as the men had come, Mrs. Daggett asked us all to walk out to have some tea and it was a tea that a body wouldn't mind walkin' a mile or two for, even in the hot sun. There was cake — five or six kinds — cookies, ginger snaps, she was noted for her ginger snaps, doughnuts, I don't jest remember how many different kinds of pies they had, I declare it was eight or nine. There

was all kinds of canned stuff — peaches, pears and different berries, all kinds of james and jells and cold meats, three or four kinds of meats and pickles, Mrs. Daggett always made the best pickle a body could think of. Nobody ever gave such a an elegant quiltin' party as that one. After the dishes was washed and cleared away we played games."

"Oh, do tell me what games you played in those days. Don't the children of today play a great many of those same games?"

"Well, yes, I 'spose they do, though I don't see very much of them — the children I mean — nowadays. I think most children in this town are very rude[,?] I don't know how it is in other places, but they certainly are here."

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"Do tell me about your games, what you played and all about them."

"We played roll the cover, that was one, and drop the handkerchief, was another, London Bridge, another, and postoffice — all games I guess they do play today."

"Did the older people play them too?"

"Surely, you see cards was jest comin' in then. Some folks played casino and euchere euchre, but lots of folks thought they was wicked, so all we could do to enjoy ourselves — no matter how young or how old — was to dance, play games or spoon and some of the older folks disapproved of young folks spoonin' — in public — any way.

"One of the girls that night — Lucy Sears — who was in love with Eugene Downs, a nice, good lookin' lad, got so upset because Eugene had so many letters in the postoffice for another girl named Susan Williams, that she suddenly said she was afraid she was goin' to faint and she made so much fuss about it that everybody had to stop playin' and wait on her. Of course, as soon as she got the kissin' game stopped, she got well. Mrs. Daggett had got a fiddler in for us to dance, but, my land, it was too hot. We all looked like string

beans before we even got started and we wasn't fit to look at after we'd hopped about a little, but we didn't hop long, we couldn't, so then we sat around and fanned ourselves and wished we was home and could get on some clothes that was cool. Then some one asked Susan Williams to sing. She's the girl Eugene was havin' all the letters for in the postoffice game."

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"Susan was a real good little singer, I used to like to hear her. Well, after everybody had coaxed and coaxed — you know in those days folks thought you was forward if, when anybody asked you to sing or play or recite or something, you did it right off. You'd have to be coaxed and then of course, after a while you'd give in and do what they asked you to do.

"Well, as I said, after she'd been coaxed enough, she sang / 'the Last Rose of Summer' and was singin' it real pretty, too, but right when she got started, Lucy Sears, if you please, got the hiccoughs. Maybe she did really have 'em but she wouldn't do anything to stop 'em. Henrietta got her some water, but she wouldn't take it. She said she was sure it wouldn't do her a bit of good and will you believe it, she kept hiccoughin' until Susan had got through.

"If I'd been Susan I'd have kept on singing until I had worn her down. I wish she had done it but I guess she didn't think of it[,?] I know I didn't. If I had I'd have put her up to it. Well, anyway, the evenin was nearly over. We went outdoors and set around singin' hymns and old songs. It was funny to see Eugene Downs sittin' on the steps of the porch with Lucy on one side and Susan on the other, both makin' an awful set for him, and he settin' there pretendin he didn't know what they was about.

"We all set around waitin' to see which one he'd take hom home , but he fooled us, he jest got himself up from the step where he'd been settin' said 'Good Night' to everybody and went home alone."

“Oh, what fun you must have had but there's one thing more I must know . Did Henrietta like her quilt?”

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“She loved it, she kept it for years. I've seen it dozens of times and every time I've seen it I've always felt like openin' a window or something, no matter if it is a cold day I begin to feel warm all over, it's July again. You know I think it's such a pity that folks don't quilt any more. When I look back on those days I know they miss a load of fun, it was really kinda nice.”

“I'm sure it was, I'd like to quilt myself,” a little shriek stopped me.

“Good gracious me, is that the time? Why I've been here nearly two hours. My! My! Well, let me tell you what I come for — oh, dear me, I do so dislike solicitin', I don't mind workin' in the kitchen, or washin' dishes, for the church[ .?] I'll do anything but to me solicitin' is awful.”

“Please don't feel that way about it. Tell me, what can I do for you?”

“Well, the Alliance is havin' a small fair, could you — would you[-?] give, well, say an apron, or maybe make a pie or a cake. There, it is out, oh, how I do hate to solicit.”

Having my doubts about the goodness of either a pie or cake of my making, I told Miss Bartlett I would gladly give an apron.

Thanking me most “copiously”, Miss Bartlett hastily said her “goodbyes” and away she flew — yes, “flew” might be the word that best describes Miss Bartlett's exit.

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And, so, at last the cause for Miss Bartlett's uneasiness was explained — she dislikes to “solicit”. It wasn't a bad afternoon — she would have her apron and I had an interview

which I had wanted for sometime. The delivery of the apron might open the way for more conversation.